

**Special
Issue:**

Student
Performance
Standards

Kentucky Teacher

JUNE 2001



New CATS standards clarify levels of student performance

By Faun S. Fishback
Kentucky Department of Education

On June 5, the Kentucky Board of Education accepted teacher recommendations that clarify what is meant by novice, apprentice, proficient and distinguished student performance for each content area and grade level tested annually as part of the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS). The standards are the final major component of CATS, Kentucky's new long-term assessment and accountability system.

More than 1,600 Kentucky teachers participated in an 18-month process to develop the standards. The teachers used a process designed by a panel of national testing experts that advises the state board on assessment and accountability issues. According to state and national curriculum and assessment experts, it was the most comprehensive standards-setting process ever undertaken by any state. (See Pages 4-6 for details.)

Prior to accepting the teacher recommendations, the board heard from representatives of several education groups that have been consulted throughout the development of CATS. Benny Lile, chair of the School Curriculum, Assessment and Accountability Council, said the council is satisfied with the qual-

ity of the procedures and processes used to develop the new standards. Ken Henry, director of the Office of Education Accountability, said he believed the multifaceted process should make most people feel comfortable with the new standards.

James Catterall, chair of the panel of national testing experts that advises the state board on assessment and accountability issues, called the standards "more extensive, more thought-through, more multidimensional than standards developed by any other state."

The board also heard results from an online survey measuring the public's opinion about the standards-setting process. More than 3,000 people – 2,891 identifying themselves as educators – responded to the survey on the Kentucky Department of Education's Web site between May 10 and 28. Almost 32 percent of the respondents said they were "very comfortable" or "comfortable" with the standards-setting process. Only 16 percent said they were uncomfortable with the process. (See complete survey results online at www.kde.state.ky.us/standards.)

Most respondents said the performance descrip-

tions were appropriate in each subject and grade level. A small number rated the recommended standards as too high. A smaller number said the standards were too low.

Education partners, including the Kentucky School Boards Association and the Local Superintendents' Advisory Council, have agreed to help disseminate information on the new standards to their members. The Department of Education plans professional development opportunities to guide teachers in using the new standards to improve classroom instruction and boost student achievement. (See Page 7.)

State board chair Helen Mountjoy applauded Kentucky educators for their participation and leadership in the standards-setting process. "Three years ago, I wasn't sure we could build this new assessment and accountability system," she said, "but every time we've asked teachers and administrators for their assistance, they have responded. These new standards, developed by teachers, are a mechanism to move Kentucky schools to proficiency and beyond."

New standards give us a compass in our journey to proficiency and beyond

By Gene Wilhoit
Commissioner of Education

With the Kentucky Board of Education's acceptance of a new set of student performance standards (see Page 1), Kentucky's public schools have a new "compass" to guide us on our journey to proficiency and beyond.

For 11 years, we have worked hard to refine a new system of public education to ensure that every child in Kentucky's public schools is given the maximum opportunity to achieve at high levels. In 2000 we completed a two-year cycle that took us to a new, Kentucky-developed and nationally acclaimed school accountability system. This month our Kentucky Board of Education accepted student performance standards developed specifically for that new system.

Never before have we had the unifying and focused direction that these new standards provide. We have known the destination: proficiency – a score of 100 or better on a 140-point scale – for every school by the year 2014. (Now we must be about the business of getting there.) The Department of Education will soon offer training and materials on ways to use the new standards and related examples of student work to analyze individual student performance. (See Page 7.)

To help every school and district track its own progress toward proficiency and beyond, the department will provide customized growth charts showing their current academic performance index, which will serve as the baseline, and a year-by-year path to reaching proficiency by the target date. (See Page 6 for an example.) When these charts arrive in August, each school community will know where it is now and where it needs to be in the years to come.

In September, each school will receive scores from tests taken in April 2001, the first year of the first two-year cycle completely under the new assessment system. By analyzing those scores and data from the previous two years, each school can determine its academic strengths and weaknesses, then use the new student performance standards, Kentucky's Core Content for Assessment and the Kentucky Program of Studies as guidelines for improving instruction in those weak areas.

As your school begins to look at where you are now and where you need to go, you might be interested in knowing how Kentucky's most successful schools are achieving at high levels. Based on data from schools throughout the state, we in the Department of Education have compiled the following list of characteristics common to successful schools.

- All students in these schools have access to the total curriculum, and individual student success is at the center of all efforts.

- The schools use scores from state tests and other assessments to identify learning needs. Each school's staff breaks down test data by gender, race and economic level to identify achievement gaps.
- The schools have plans with specific strategies for improving student performance.
- The schools target their discretionary funds to meet data-identified needs.
- The schools place an intentional focus on key curriculum transition points within the building (for example, from primary to intermediate grades or from grade 9 to grade 10) and between building levels (for example, from elementary to middle school). Educators at all grade levels communicate to build vertical alignment of the curriculum from grade to grade and school to school throughout the district, based on Kentucky's Core Content for Assessment, Academic Expectations and the Program of Studies. Instruction at each grade level prepares students for instruction at the next level.
- The schools make staff assignments in ways that give all students equal access to educators' individual instructional strengths.
- All teachers in these schools receive professional development opportunities based on high-quality, formal evaluations, individual professional growth needs and the needs of the school. Continuing analysis of test scores and day-to-day student work drives school improvement and professional development planning.
- School leaders have opportunities to develop and expand their instructional leadership skills.

This research-based list of strategies – and new performance standards – are perfectly aligned with our assessment and accountability system. They are tools we haven't had before. I encourage schools to combine these tools with the Kentucky Core Content for Assessment and Kentucky's Program of Studies plus a thorough analysis of student work to chart their course toward proficiency.

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To respond to the commissioner on this topic, phone (502) 564-3141 or send e-mail to gwilhoit@kde.state.ky.us.

See Page 7 for information about the Department of Education's plans for new standards-related resources and professional development services for teachers.

The new student performance standards are available on the Kentucky Department of Education's Web site at www.kde.state.ky.us/standards. Refer questions to Cheryl Ungerleider in the department's Office of Communications at (502) 564-3421, or phone toll free (800) 533-5372.



Now what?

What do CATS standards mean to teachers?

By Faun S. Fishback
Kentucky Department of Education

The Kentucky Board of Education has accepted the new student performance standards developed by more than 1,600 Kentucky teachers for the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS).

Now what?

For the first time since school reform began in 1990, Kentucky educators, students and parents have specific descriptions of standards for student performance on the Kentucky Core Content Tests. Because of the teachers' work during the standards-setting process, Kentucky now has a set of descriptions for novice, apprentice, proficient and distinguished performance for every content area and every grade level that is tested annually as part of CATS.

Donald Ross Green, chief research psychologist for CTB McGraw-Hill, Kentucky's test vendor, said the descriptions of student performance are "user friendly" because teachers wrote them for teachers, in terms teachers use and understand.

Combined with the Kentucky Core Content for Assessment, released test items and their scoring rubrics, and actual student work, the performance standards give teachers a rich resource for determining how well their students are doing academically. The standards also will guide instruction as teachers become proficient in using them to assess student performance.

"Access to content standards and performance descriptions in the classroom by teachers and students — to be able to review actual work products from the tests and actual test questions — should give plenty of guidance so that the work of teaching and learning can go forward," said John Poggio, vice chair of the National Technical Advisory Panel for Assessment and Accountability, which advises the Kentucky Board of Education on the development of CATS.

"The standards give teachers something in addition to their daily interaction with the students," added Green. "With these descriptions, teachers will be able to say to students: 'You are an apprentice. These are the kinds of things you

can do now. Here are some more things you need to learn to become proficient.'"

Teachers who were involved in the standards-setting methods and the synthesis step agree.

"By looking at the descriptions and the performance data for the students, I think I am much better able to see how to guide my students in our open-response items to give a complete and more successful answer," said Carla Douglas Repass, a sophomore and senior English teacher at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Fayette County.

Repass said she posted the draft descriptions on her classroom wall last year. As she covered each skill in class, she placed a sticker on the poster. She found the process helpful to herself and to her students.

"I think by seeing the skills they need and the depth and structure they need to answer questions correctly, students felt very proud and confident about their learning," Repass said. "It becomes an attainable goal instead of some sort of scary thing. It becomes a staircase instead of having to build your own ladder."

Ann Booth, a mathematics teacher at Lincoln County High School, said students at her school receive a summary of core content from the faculty with an agreement that they will learn these things before graduating.

"They can check [expectations] off as they progress through the curriculum, and they can make sure they've learned the things they need to learn," she said. "We can give students these standards and say, 'This is how you will be judged. If you want to get to proficient, look at the words that talk about proficient. Those that you are having trouble with, that's where you need to concentrate.'"

Kirk Thomas, a 4th-grade science teacher at Centerfield Elementary in Oldham County, is optimistic about the new standards and what they mean for teachers. "Teachers won't be wondering, 'How should I teach this? What am I going to do to get students to this level?'" he said. "It will be laid out for everybody, and we'll know what to do."

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For more comments from teachers involved in the standards-setting process, see Page 5.

"Teachers won't be wondering, 'How should I teach this? What am I going to do to get students to this level?' It will be laid out for everybody, and we'll know what to do."

Kirk Thomas,
Centerfield Elementary science teacher and participant in the standards-setting process

Teachers did it!

1,651 teachers set the standards for student work

Over the past two years, *Kentucky Teacher* has chronicled the development of Kentucky's performance standards for the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS). Here are some key points about teacher involvement in setting the new standards.

- In 1999, national testing experts serving as consultants to the Kentucky Board of Education recommended the development of new performance standards aligned with CATS. The testing experts designed a five-step inclusive process to describe student performance on the Kentucky Core Content Tests and determine the cutscores – numerical values – defining novice, apprentice, proficient and distinguished levels of student work.

- The state board invited teachers to take part in the process. Teachers worked in content-area groups that represented all grade levels, geographic regions and ethnic groups to develop standards for the four performance categories in each content area and at each grade level tested.

- First, 88 teachers looked at descriptions from the former testing system and at Kentucky's Core Content for Assessment and national content standards. They drafted performance descriptions for every grade level and content area tested. Those descriptions became a common starting point for the entire process. (Writing teachers, with agreement of the Writing Advisory Committee, decided that current writing standards were still appropriate and that no changes were necessary. The alternate portfolio was excluded from this standards-setting process because there

was no change in the

- Over the next two years, teachers developed performance standards for each content area and grade. Groups of teachers reviewed and approved student work from Kentucky and other states, wrote performance descriptions of work samples and student responses to the Kentucky Core Content Tests; and determined cutscores according to difficulty.

In February 2001, the state board of education groups synthesized the standards and recommended cutscores to the state board of education for practice work from professional teachers.

Guided by the work of the Writing Advisory Committee, comments submitted to the Kentucky Board of Education were incorporated into the cutscores on June 5, 2001.

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The Standards-Setting Process

Teachers Involved	1,651
Methods Used	3 national testing experts; 88 teachers; 18 content-area groups
Items Reviewed	72 open response items per content area
Actual Test Items Used?	Yes
Actual Student Work Used?	Yes
Performance Level Descriptions Developed	18 specific performance level descriptions (novice, apprentice, proficient, distinguished) for each of 6 content areas
Basis for Teachers' Final Recommendations	Teachers' analysis of student work examples
Standards Match Core Content for Assessment?	Yes

Student performance

his assessment.)
t nine months, teachers used three different and
d standards-setting methods to arrive at recom-
e descriptions and cutscores in each content
ups of teachers examined samples of actual stu-
ntucky classrooms and matched them to draft
k at each performance level; reviewed test items
ses from two forms of the 2000 Kentucky Core
examined test booklets that ranked the test items

ty.
01, 133 teachers drawn from the participating
l the results of the three methods and recom-
o separate novice work from apprentice, appren-
icent, and proficient work from distinguished.
work of these 1,651 teachers and more than 3,000
ed during a public review period, the Kentucky
a accepted the new performance standards and

Thanks, teachers!

work will help guide schools
to proficiency by 2014.

at a Glance

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descriptions of novice, apprentice,
and distinguished for each grade
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nt areas

professional judgment based on
core content, test items and
of student work

Speaking From Experience

Seven teachers talk about the task of setting Kentucky's student performance standards

Soon after the close of an 18-month process to set new standards aligned with the new Kentucky Core Content Tests, the Department of Education surveyed the teachers who were part of that process. Here are four of the survey questions and some of the teacher responses.

1. What was the value of this process to you as a teacher?

"I now have a better understanding of what is expected of students and what it means to be a proficient science student. ... I understand the importance of ensuring that all students are taught all core content. How could a student answer a question over material that they had not been taught?"

Diane Johnson
Lewis County High School

"I now have a much clearer picture of what happens to the student response booklets after they leave our school and of how all those individual student scores combine to make a school score. ... I found the opportunity to converse and collaborate with other English teachers from across the state to be personally and professionally enriching. Their comments and reactions about teaching and the assessment process challenged, validated and inspired me all at the same time."

Carla Repass, Paul Laurence Dunbar High, Fayette County

2. In what way will these new standards be an appropriate measure of student performance?

"The new standards are the reflection of work from members who are closest to the students. What will be measured is what is actually expected (core content) coinciding with what students are actually capable of doing. I feel that the state is right on track."

Darryl Farmer, Fern Creek High School, Jefferson County

"The new standards were carefully designed around core content and the descriptions. We worked diligently to align the criteria of the questions with the descriptions. Alignment is the key word. I believe we have aligned the cutscores as accurately as possible at this time. Therefore, our assessment is reliable. ... This state is on the cutting edge of analyzing test data and implementing appropriate assessments."

DeVona Hickerson
Spencer County Elementary

"After teaching 4th grade for nine years, I have realistic expectations for students in the assessment areas. I feel the new standards are both fair and appropriate for all schools and students because they were set by teachers who know what students are capable of doing."

Kirk Thomas
Centerfield Elementary, Oldham County

3. In what way will these standards impact instruction?

"They will further emphasize instruction and give credibility to what we've already been doing."

DeVona Hickerson
Spencer County Elementary

"[The new standards] will force curriculum alignment within schools and districts. These standards [identify] which key concepts should be stressed. They will require that students are taught concepts, not just facts. The standards promote developing the whole child, not just one intelligence or set of skills. The standards should help teachers understand the importance of integrating reading and writing across grade levels and content areas."

Diane Johnson
Lewis County High School

4. How do you think this process will inspire confidence in the new standards?

"Any time you provide an open process, you inspire confidence."

Ann Booth
Lincoln County High School

"As opposed to how standards have been set in the past, we have made a quantum leap in how we determine assessment cutscores. ... I feel better, and I know we had a terrific representation of the various grade levels and contents. ... Since so many teachers participated in the process, there is less room for skepticism."

DeVona Hickerson
Spencer County Elementary

"This process should foster more confidence in cutscores, thus test scores, because they were established by Kentucky teachers, not a testing company or a group of 'experts.' Kentucky student work was used, not work from other states or 'samples' of student work. The process was an accurate reflection of Kentucky teacher expectations of Kentucky students using Kentucky's core content and academic expectations."

Diane Johnson
Lewis County High School

"The involvement of approximately 1,600 teachers has to inspire confidence. There is no way 1,600 teachers can be totally wrong. We worked very hard to ensure quality work. I have never worked with a more knowledgeable and dedicated committee than the two I worked with. The diversity of the committees and the common goals worked hand in hand to ensure the best possible results."

Kathy Lowe
Barren County Middle

Coming in August Customized growth charts will show each school's path to proficiency

In the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS), all schools have the same goal – a score of at least 100 on a 140-point scale by the year 2014. In August, each school will receive a customized chart showing where the school is now (the “baseline”) and where it needs to be every two years to be on track toward reaching that goal.

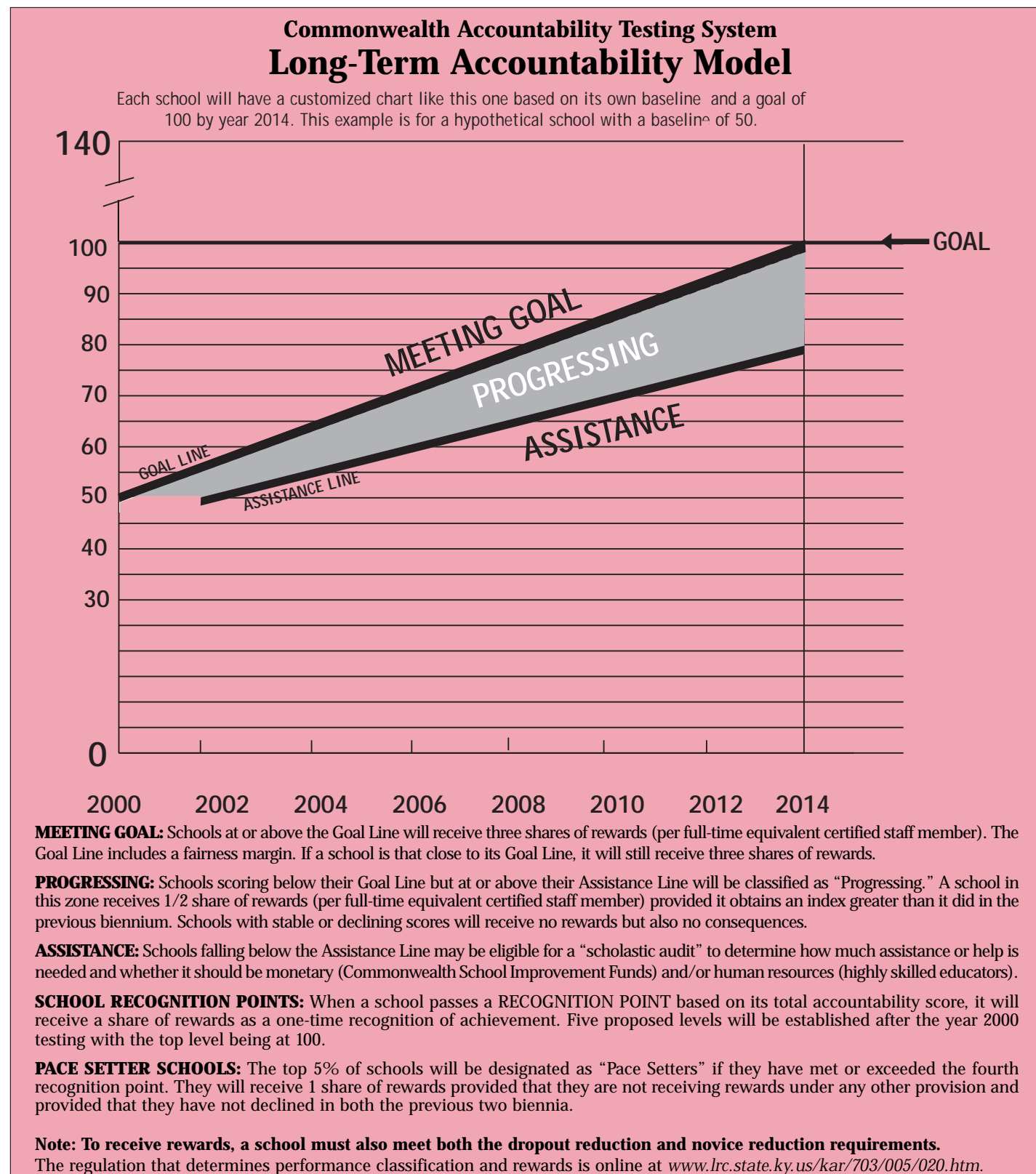
The Department of Education calculated each school's baseline by applying the cutscores from performance standards accepted in June (see Page 1) to each school's academic performance on Kentucky Core Content Tests during the 1998-99 and 1999-2000 school years.

Each school's customized growth chart will show the school's own baseline at the appropriate point on the left side of the chart. (The example on this page shows the baseline for a hypothetical school with a baseline of 50.) A line drawn between the baseline and the goal of 100 will establish the school's “goal line” showing where the school needs to be every two years to meet the goal.

In August, each school will receive an updated customized growth chart that tracks its performance index each biennium between 2002 and 2014 to illustrate progress toward the goal. Each biennium's chart will become part of the school's report card to the public.

School scores in 2002 and beyond will place each school in one of three categories: Meeting Goal, Progressing, or Assistance. See the sample chart for explanation of these terms.

Refer questions about the chart and the CATS long-term accountability model to Cheryl Ungerleider at (502) 564-3421, (800) 533-5372 or cungerle@kde.state.ky.us.



Resources abound for learning about performance standards

Want to know even more about the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System's student performance standards? The Department of Education plans to give teachers and school administrators the tools they need to use the new student performance standards effectively.

The department has developed this professional development schedule:

Now Online:

- The 18 specific descriptions of novice, apprentice, proficient and distinguished performance for each level (elementary, middle and high school) in each of six content areas assessed. See them at www.kde.state.ky.us/standards.

During August:

- Post released test items with student responses that fit each performance level in every content area assessed.
- Distribute long-term baseline/2014 growth charts to schools (see Page 6).
- Train KDE staff to present regional training for district teacher teams on proficient work across content areas in the accountability grades.

Sept. 15:

- Release 2001 Kentucky Core Content Tests scores to school districts, two weeks before providing scores and related information to the public.
- Release public information packets to guide schools and districts in communicating test results to their communities.

- Release revised Consolidated Plan materials for the 2002 plan, aligned to the new student performance standards, long-term accountability and the "Standards and Indicators for School Improvement."

Sept. 24-Oct. 12:

- Complete regional two-day district team training on proficient work, with school-embedded follow-up during rest of the year. Those trained in these sessions will train educators in their districts.

On or After Oct. 1:

- Release 2001 school scores to the public.
- Conduct training for professional development coordinators for school-embedded follow-up on proficient work and implications for consolidated school/district planning.
- Continue school-embedded follow-up through district supports.

Throughout the summer and fall, the department will offer presentations at various professional conferences. Watch the department's Web site (www.kde.state.ky.us) and the August issue of *Kentucky Teacher* for additional information about training and materials related to the student performance standards.

Refer questions to Cheryl Ungerleider, (502) 564-3421 or cungerle@kde.state.ky.us.

Another First for Kentucky

Wilhoit 'talks' directly with all teachers at the same time – via e-mail

When a company as huge, powerful and knowledgeable as Microsoft says something can't be done, many people would just accept it and move on. Not so in Kentucky!

Education Commissioner Gene Wilhoit wanted to do something new. He wanted to write an e-mail message, click "send" and deliver information almost instantly to every public school teacher in the state.

Sending e-mail to more than 40,000 people at one time is no easy thing. In fact, the people at Microsoft, the producer of the e-mail program used in the Kentucky Education Technology System (KETS), said no other government or business organization had ever done it.

But Kentucky did it! On May 7, Wilhoit sent his first message to almost all teachers. (One district had not yet completed the necessary adjustments to its system to be included.) In that message, he introduced teachers to the new communication capability and let them know he would be using it from time to time to seek their opinions on education issues.

On the following Thursday, he sent his second message, giving teachers information about the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System's standards-setting process. His message linked to an online survey inviting teachers to tell the Kentucky Board of Education what they thought about the process and the proposed standards. More than 3,000 survey responses arrived by the May 28 deadline.

"Teachers are telling me they like having this immediate and direct communication," Wilhoit said. "Many have said how much they appreciate being involved in discussions of important issues. Each teacher in Kentucky now has the opportunity to influence education policy."

Staff of the commissioner's office and the department's offices of Education Technology and Communications collaborated to bring the new all-teacher e-mail function online.



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The Kentucky Teacher of the Year 2002 is Stephen H.T. Lin, who teaches choral music at Jefferson County's Atherton High School. For more about Lin, Middle School Teacher of the Year Anthony Creed Turner and Elementary Teacher of the Year Reeda Stamper Hart, plus 18 winners of Ashland Inc. Teacher Achievement Awards, go to www.kde.state.ky.us/toy on the Internet.

Commissioner of Education Gene Wilhoit

Associate Commissioner Hunt Helm
for Communications


Director Armando Arrastia
Division of Public Information

Editor Fran Salyers

Copy Writer Faun S. Fishback


Photographer Rick McComb

Graphics and Design Susie Morrow, Manager
Bill Davis
Michael Gray
Brett Hurst



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School teacher Kathy Lowe,
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